



Amnesty International's selected human rights concerns on Iran

For Danish Minister of Foreign Affairs travelling to Iran in January 2016

DEATH PENALTY

Iran remains the second most prolific executioner in the world after China. The majority of executions in the country have been for drug-related offences. Iran's Anti-Narcotics Law provides mandatory death sentences for a range of drug-related offences, including trafficking more than 5kg of narcotics derived from opium or more than 30g of heroin, morphine, cocaine or their chemical derivatives. This is in direct breach of international law, which restricts the use of the death penalty to only the "most serious crimes" – those involving intentional killing.¹ Drug-related offences do not meet this threshold.

People most likely to be accused, sentenced and executed are those belonging to disadvantaged sectors of the population, such as Afghan nationals and economically disadvantaged people, including ethnic minorities. The authorities have increasingly admitted to the inadequacy of the death penalty for tackling the country's drug problem. In December 2015, several members of Parliament proposed a bill to replace the death penalty with life imprisonment for drug-related offenses that do not involve armed activities.

Under Iranian law, the death penalty is also imposed for vaguely worded and overly broad offences such as "enmity against God" (*moharebeh*) and "spreading corruption on earth" (*efsad fel arz*), and for acts which should not be criminalized at all, let alone attract the death penalty. These include, for example, "insulting the Prophet" and certain consensual sexual conducts between both adults of the same and those of the opposite sex.

Murder is another offence in Iran that attracts the death penalty under the Islamic principle of "retribution-in-kind" (*qesas*). Individuals convicted of murder are denied the right to seek pardon or clemency from the state, as only the family of the victim may grant a pardon.

Case:

Spiritual teacher **Mohammad Ali Taheri**, a prisoner of conscience, was sentenced to death on 1 August 2015 for "spreading corruption on earth" (*efsad fel-azr*) through his spiritual beliefs and teachings and by establishing a new spiritual group called *Erfan-e Halgheh*. This was after two trial sessions before Branch 26 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran on 11 March and 29 April.

Amnesty International understands that Mohammad Ali Taheri's death sentence for the charge of "spreading corruption on earth" is based on the same spiritual teachings and practices which were relied upon in October 2011 to convict him of several offences including "insulting Islamic sanctities", and for which he has already spent over four years in solitary confinement in Section 2A of Evin Prison, which is run by Iran's Revolutionary Guards. Amnesty International is concerned that the death sentence for the charge of "spreading corruption on earth" has come as a result of pressure from the Revolutionary Guards, which raises alarms about the judiciary's independence and impartiality in Iran.

Since sentencing Mohammad Ali Taheri to death in August, the authorities have prevented him from properly preparing his appeal to the Supreme Court. He has been only allowed to meet his lawyer once for 20 minutes. The authorities have further omitted a 200-page defence

¹ Article 6(2) of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.

statement from his casefile that he had previously written and given to his interrogator and denied him a pen and paper to write a defence statement for his Supreme Court appeal. Mohammad Ali Taheri's lawyers submitted an appeal against his death sentence on 18 August and **his case in pending before the Supreme Court**, which has so far declined to provide any information about the status of the appeal.

Mohammad Ali Taheri was on a hunger strike from 13 August to 21 October, in protest at these abuses of his fair trial rights.

Amnesty International considers Mohammad Ali Taheri a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of belief and freedom of expression and association. His death sentence must be quashed and he must be immediately and unconditionally released.

The use of death penalty against juvenile offenders

Iran is among a handful of countries that still uses the death penalty against individuals who were below 18 years of age at the time of their crime, in contravention of international law including the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights to which Iran is a party. Under Iranian law, the age at which children are held culpable as adults is 15 lunar years for boys and 9 lunar years for girls. In 2014, Amnesty International received reports of at least 14 executions of juvenile offenders taking place. In 2015, Amnesty International has confirmed the execution of at least three juvenile offenders. They included **Javad Saberi**, hanged on 15 April, **Samad Zahabi**, hanged on 5 October, and **Fatemeh Salbehi**, hanged on 13 October. Human rights groups reported that another juvenile offender, **Vazir Amroddin**, an Afghan national was hanged in June/July. According to a report issued by the UN Secretary General in August 2014, more than 160 juvenile offenders were on death row.

In May 2013, Iran adopted a Islamic Penal Code, which gives judges discretion to replace the death penalty with an alternative punishment if they decide that the juvenile offender did not comprehend the nature of the crime or there are doubts about his/her “mental growth and maturity” at the time of the crime. This provision falls far short of Iran’s international obligations, under which granting judges or courts any discretion in the matter is unlawful – they must not under any circumstances have the authority to sentence juvenile offenders to death.

Cases:

Juvenile offender **Milad Azimi**, may be at risk of the death penalty in connection with murder of a man when he was 17 years old. He was sentenced to death by Branch Three of the Provincial Criminal Court of Kermanshah Province in May 2015 under the Islamic principle of “retribution-in-kind” (*qesas*) for his alleged involvement in a fatal stabbing during a fight among several young men in December 2013. He has denied to have inflicted the fatal stab wound. In its verdict, the court acknowledged that he had been under 18 at the time of the crime but said there was “no doubt about his mental growth and maturity and that he understood the nature of his crime and the dangers of using a knife”. His death sentence was upheld in August 2015 by Branch 17 of the Supreme Court. Milad Azimi subsequently requested a retrial based on the new juvenile sentencing guidelines in Iran’s 2013 Islamic Penal Code. The request is currently pending before Branch 30 of the Supreme Court. In October 2015, concerns were raised that the Supreme Court has rejected the request. The authorities have since confirmed however that the Supreme Court has not yet reached a decision, pending which a stay of Milad Azimi’s execution has been ordered.

Milad Azimi was held in a police station (*agahi*) in the western province of Kermanshah for 15 days following his arrest in December 2011. During this time he is believed to have been tortured and otherwise ill-treated: this included being flogged to make him “confess” that he

had stabbed the victim. He was denied access to a lawyer and was only allowed to see his family six days after his arrest, when he was taken to the Office of the Prosecutor. He retracted his “confessions” before the prosecutor and during his trial, saying it had been extracted through torture. No investigation into his allegations of torture are known to have been carried out.

Amnesty International has urged the Iranian authorities to halt any plans to execute Milad Azimi immediately, and to ensure that his death sentence is quashed and he is granted a retrial that complies with international fair trial standards, without recourse to the death penalty.

Sajad Sanjari, another Iranian juvenile offender, who had been sentenced to death in January 2012 for fatally stabbing a man when he was 15 years old, was sentenced to death for the second time on 21 November after a re-trial. He has appealed the sentence to the Supreme Court.

Sajad Sanjari had been granted a retrial in June 2015 after new juvenile sentencing guidelines had been introduced in the 2013 Islamic Penal Code, which gives judges discretion to replace the death penalty with an alternative punishment if they determined that juvenile offenders had not understood the nature of the crime or its consequences, or there were doubts about their “mental growth and maturity” at the time of the crime.

Branch Three of the Provincial Criminal Court of Kermanshah Province re-sentenced Sajad Sanjari to death, with little explanation, on 21 November 2015. The verdict, which has been reviewed by Amnesty International, simply states that Sajad Sanjari merits the death penalty as he “understood the nature of his crime and there is no doubt or uncertainty about his mental maturity and development at the time of the commission of the crime”. Amnesty International understands that during the re-trial, the court focused on whether Sajad Sanjari could distinguish right from wrong at the time of the crime. His lawyer highlighted that Sajad Sanjari had not had access to proper schooling, as he worked as a shepherd and his parents were poor and illiterate.

Sajad Sanjari was arrested on 2 August 2010 after a man was fatally stabbed. Branch One of the Provincial Criminal Court of Kermanshah Province convicted him of murder and sentenced him to death in January 2012. During his trial, Sajad Sanjari admitted that he had stabbed the man but maintained that he had done so in self-defence after the man tried to rape him. He said that the man had warned him the previous day that he would come to rape him, so he took a kitchen knife to scare him away. The court rejected Sajad Sanjari’s claims, after several witnesses testified to the good character of the deceased. The court added that even if the rape threats and the attack had been carried out, Sajad Sanjari could not claim self-defence because the attack was predictable from at least a day before and he had had ample time to raise the matter with the authorities or seek help from people living nearby, to reduce hostility and prevent the attack from happening.

The Supreme Court first quashed the death sentence in January 2013 because of flaws in the investigation process but ultimately upheld it in February 2014.

Amnesty International has urged the Iranian authorities to ensure that Sajad Sanjari’s death sentence is commuted immediately.

Juvenile offender, **Salar Shadizadi**, now aged 24, was sentenced to death for stabbing a friend by Branch 11 of the Provincial Criminal Court of Gilan Province, in December 2007, under the Islamic principle of *qesas* (retribution-in-kind). He was 15 years old at the time. The Supreme Court upheld the sentence in March 2008. In July 2013, Salar Shadizadi requested a commutation of his death sentence based on Article 91 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code. This led to his case being sent back and forth between the Provincial Criminal Court of Gilan Province and the Supreme Court. Eventually, in April 2015, Branch 13 of the Supreme Court

denied Salar Shadizadi's request, stating: "The *prima facie* presumption is that individuals who have passed the age of *bolagh* [15 lunar years for boys, nine for girls] have attained full mental maturity... A claim to the contrary requires proof, which has not been established here." The court cited an opinion from the Legal Medicine Organization of Iran (LMOI) from 2013 that Salar Shadizadi had been "sane" at the time of the crime but his mental maturity could not be assessed years after the crime.

Salar Shadizadi was rescheduled for execution on Saturday 28 November but his execution was postponed, to allow efforts to get the murder victim's family to pardon him. The Prosecutor General of Gilan Province confirmed less than two days before the scheduled date that his execution has been postponed to January. This was the third time that Salar Shadizadi has been subjected to the mental anguish of being transferred to solitary confinement in preparation for his execution and then told, at the last minute, that it has been postponed. The execution of Salar Shadizadi was previously scheduled for 1 August 2015 but was postponed at the last minute, possibly as a result of international pressure. His execution had been scheduled and postponed before this, in July 2013. That time, the authorities also halted the execution at the last minute, after Salar Shadizadi requested a commutation of his death sentence based on Article 91 of the revised Islamic Penal Code adopted into law in May 2013.

These cases highlight, yet again, the compelling need to immediately commute the death sentences of all juvenile offenders, and adopt domestic laws that abolish the use of the death penalty against all individuals convicted of committing a crime while they were below the age of 18.

REPRESSION OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS AND RESTRICTIONS ON FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION, ASSOCIATION, AND ASSEMBLY

The rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly are unduly restricted in Iran, in contravention of Iran's obligations under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, both of which Iran has ratified. Much of the legal framework restricting freedom of expression, association and assembly relates to measures in the Islamic Penal Code, which was adopted in May 2013. Scores of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, including lawyers, journalists, members of ethnic and religious minorities, trade unionists, and activists remain imprisoned.

Amnesty International believes that restrictions on freedom of expression, association and assembly have persistently intensified over the past years. A new provision in the 2013 Islamic Penal Code has given rise to a new trend of repression of anyone who voices dissent. Under Article 134 of the 2013 Islamic Penal Code individuals convicted of multiple charges must serve only the lengthiest single sentence. However, judges are obligated to impose sentences that exceed the statutory maximum for any single offence when they convict defendants of more than three crimes. This has resulted in the authorities bringing multiple spurious charges against some peaceful critics as a means to ensure a lengthy prison term. This pattern is illustrated in the cases detailed below.

Cases:

Atena Daemi, a 27-year old anti-death penalty activist, was sentenced to 14 years imprisonment on 12 May 2015 for her human rights activism, following a 15-minute trial which took place at the same time as three others. She was convicted of "gathering and colluding against national security", "spreading propaganda against the system", "insulting the founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Supreme Leader" and concealing evidence.

The charges stem from her criticism on Facebook and Twitter of executions and human rights violations in Iran, as well as her participation in gatherings outside prison in solidarity with families of death row prisoners, distribution of anti-death penalty pamphlets and her

association with human rights defenders and the families of those killed during the crackdown that followed the 2009 election.

She has been held in Evin Prison since her October 2014 arrest and spent the first 58 days in solitary confinement in Section 2A of the prison, which is under the control of the Revolutionary Guards. During this time she was interrogated on numerous occasions, often for several hours at a time, without access to a lawyer. She said her interrogators offered to grant her easier access to the toilet in exchange for her “co-operation”. During these lengthy interrogations, she had to sit blindfolded facing a wall.

Amnesty International considers Atena Daemi a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. She must be immediately and unconditionally released.

Two Civil society activists **Omid Alishenas** and **Asou Rostami** were sentenced in May 2015 to 10 and seven years, respectively, by Branch 28 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. The court convicted them of charges including “gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security” and “insulting the Supreme Leader”. According to the verdict, seen by Amnesty International, the court used the men’s participation in a gathering in front of the United Nations office in Tehran in solidarity with the people of Kobani in Syria, gatherings in solidarity with families of death row prisoners, their association with human rights defenders and their postings on social media as “evidence” against them. The court also sentenced Omid Alishenas to a fine for “possession of a satellite dish” and CDs that the authorities deemed “inappropriate” (*mobtazal*). The verdict also rebukes Omid Alishenas for “distributing a film called To Light a Candle in support of the deviant sect of Baha’ism and [in relation] to the deprivation of this sect from higher education”. It further finds him guilty of “distributing false information about those executed in the 1988”. They have appealed against their sentences and their case is pending before an appeal court.

The men had been arrested in September and October 2014 and held in Section 2A of Tehran’s Evin Prison for several months without access to lawyers. Amnesty International understands that their hearing on 7 March lasted no more than half an hour. Both men are now held in Section 8 of Evin prison, where the cells are infested with beetles and other insects. This section also has too few beds and sanitary facilities for the number of prisoners held there. Asou Rostami is understood to have suffered a stroke in August, but the prison officials refused to take him to a hospital outside prison and only treated him in the prison’s medical clinic. He had been transferred to a hospital in July with a lung infection.

Amnesty International considers Omid Alishenas and Asou Rostami prisoners of conscience and calls for their immediate and unconditional release as they are held solely for the peaceful exercise of their rights to freedom of expression, association and assembly.

DENIAL OF MEDICAL CARE TO PRISONERS

Many prisons in Iran are severely overcrowded and have inadequate food and poor sanitation, all of which may cumulatively exacerbate prisoners’ pre-existing medical problems or contribute to new health problems. Furthermore, Amnesty International’s research shows that sick prisoners and detainees are frequently denied adequate medical care, including medication, and are refused medical leave, to which they are entitled under Iranian prison regulations.

Cases:

Human rights defender **Narges Mohammadi** is held in Tehran’s Evin Prison following her 5 May 2015 arrest. She suffers from pulmonary embolism (a blood clot in her lungs) and a neurological disorder that can result in seizures and temporary partial paralysis but she is being denied the specialized medical treatment she needs. On 11 October she was taken to a hospital outside after suffering a number of seizures in prison. Taghi Rahamani, Narges Mohammadi’s husband has told Amnesty International that the authorities handcuffed her to

the hospital bed during her first few days in hospital. They also had officers inside the room and at the door the entire time she was there. Her treatment was, however, disrupted on 28 October when she was returned to Evin prison against her doctor's advice.

The office of the Prosecutor General has also been denying Narges Mohammadi the right to make phone calls to her children, eight-year-old twins who moved abroad to live with their father as there was no one to look after them in Iran. It has been over two months since she last spoke with her children.

Narges Mohammadi's trial was to begin on 6 October, on charges including "spreading propaganda against the system" and "gathering and colluding to commit crimes against national security". On 1 May 2015, before her arrest, Narges Mohammadi told Amnesty International that the charges against her stem solely from her peaceful human rights activism. She stated that this included giving media interviews; gathering outside prisons prior to executions to support the families of death row prisoners; her connections with other human rights activists, such as Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi; and her March 2014 meeting with Catherine Ashton. She faces several charges, including "spreading propaganda against the system", "assembly and collusion against national security", and "membership of an illegal organization whose aim is to harm national security" for her founding of Step by Step to Stop Death Penalty, a group campaigning against the death penalty in Iran.

Amnesty International considers Narges Mohammadi a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising her rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly, including her work as a human rights defender. She must be immediately and unconditionally released.

Kamal Foroughi, a 76-year-old British-Iranian man, is serving an eight-year sentence in Tehran's Evin Prison, where he has been held since May 2011. In 2013, he was convicted of charges, including espionage after an unfair trial before Branch 15 of the Revolutionary Court in Tehran. Kamal Foroughi suffers from different medical conditions and Amnesty International understands that, prior to his arrest, his doctors had said that he needed specialized medical tests and check-ups, including screening for cancer. He was transferred to a hospital outside prison several times between December 2014 and October 2015 but did not receive the care he needed because no specialists have been available. Amnesty International understands that he was taken to a hospital in November 2015 and received a number of medical tests but the outcome of these tests do not appear to have been shared with Kamal Foroughi's family members who live abroad.

Kamal Foroughi was arrested in May 2011 by men in plain clothes. Amnesty International understands that the men did not show an arrest warrant, nor explained to him the reasons for arrest. They took him to Evin Prison where he spent periods of time in solitary confinement without access to a lawyer or his family. He was only allowed to meet his lawyer the day before his court hearing which took place in early 2013. He was told in April that year that he had been convicted of espionage and "possession of alcoholic beverages", for which he is serving seven years and one year, respectively. He has now very limited access to his lawyer and is not allowed to write to, or receive letters from, his relatives living abroad. He has never been allowed British consular assistance.

Afshin Sohrabzadeh, a member of Iran's Kurdish minority, has terminal intestinal cancer and suffers from internal bleeding as a result. On 24 August 2015, he was transferred from Minab Prison, southern Iran, to Evin Prison ostensibly to receive medical treatment for his cancer. However, he was returned back to Minab Prison on 26 August without receiving any medical care. At least one doctor has recommended that he be granted medical leave, as the conditions of prison exacerbate his pain and suffering. He is serving a 25-year prison sentence in Minab Prison after he was convicted of "enmity against God" (*moharebeh*) for his alleged membership in Komaleh, a Kurdish political party affiliated with the Communist Party.

LACK OF DUE PROCESS AND UNFAIR TRIALS

On 22 June 2015, a new Code of Criminal Procedure entered into force, which introduced a number of overdue reforms that Amnesty International welcomes, including the right to access a lawyer of one's choosing at the onset of detention and throughout the course of primary investigations. However, this right is not enjoyed by those facing national security-related charges, or those accused of organized crime which are subject to such punishments as the death penalty, life imprisonment, and amputation. In these instances, the accused may only select their legal counsel for the investigation phase, which may last for months, from a roster of lawyers approved by the Head of the Judiciary. This is in direct breach of international law, including the ICCPR, which requires proceedings in all cases to scrupulously observe international standards protecting the right to a fair trial. This includes the right to counsel of choice at all stages of criminal proceedings including during pre-trial detention, questioning and primary investigation.

The new Code also fails to address the major shortcomings of Iran's criminal justice system. For example the Code allows in some cases one or two years of temporary pre-trial detention which is disproportionately long and may violate the right to presumption of innocence and the right to trial within reasonable time; fails to establish adequate provisions for the investigation and punishment of those responsible for torture and other ill-treatment; and fails to guarantee the right of individuals to be brought before an impartial and independent judicial authority promptly after arrest and detention. The Code also gives the Office of the Prosecutor broad authority to withhold information from the accused and their lawyer if he determines that disclosure would undermine the process of "uncovering the truth" or would be against national security.

Trial proceedings in Iran, particularly those before Revolutionary Courts (which have jurisdiction over national security and drug-related offences) are grossly flawed. Many detainees have told Amnesty International that courts have disregarded them when they retract their "confessions" saying that they were extracted under torture and other ill-treatment, and failed to investigate their allegations and bring those responsible to justice. Moreover, the independence of the judiciary is severely undermined by regular interference from security bodies, including Ministry of Intelligence and the Intelligence Unit of the Revolutionary Guards, which are directly involved in conducting interrogations (see Mohammad Ali Taheri above).

Cases:

Mostafa Azizi, a writer and film producer, has been sentenced to eight years' imprisonment after being convicted of national security-related offenses including "insulting the Supreme Leader", "gathering and colluding against national security", and "spreading propaganda against the system" in relation to his Facebook posts. One was a photo of Mostafa Azizi with his hair shaved in solidarity with the men whose hair was forcibly shaved after the April 2014 Evin Prison incident, when security officials subjected some inmates of the prison to sustained brutality and assaults, and the other post was a photo of Mostafa Azizi during the Pride Parade in Toronto, Canada. His trial before a Revolutionary Court branch on 1 June 2015 relied on "evidence" gathered by Revolutionary Guard interrogators during the 33 day period in which they held Mostafa Azizi in solitary confinement without access to a lawyer or his family. An appeal is pending before Branch 54 of the Revolutionary Court of Appeals.

Amnesty International considers Mostafa Azizi a prisoner of conscience, imprisoned solely for peacefully exercising his rights to freedom of expression, association, and assembly. He must be immediately and unconditionally released.

Violations of fair trial rights have also been documented in the other cases included in this briefing. They include denial of access to consular assistance, access to a lawyer from the time of arrest, prolonged solitary confinement, and reliance on torture tainted "confessions".

ATTACKS ON THE SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS OF WOMEN AND GIRLS

Iran continues its pattern of discrimination against women in Iran, as manifested most recently by the introduction in Iran's Parliament of two controversial bills that further entrench discrimination and violence against women, and reduce their access to sexual and reproductive health services, leaving them at increased risk of unintended pregnancy, unsafe abortion, maternal mortality, HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections. Since 2012, the government has also eliminated funding for the state Family and Population Planning Programme, which oversaw the delivery of family planning and reproductive health services, including free condoms and modern contraceptives across the country to millions of women.

The Bill to Increase Fertility Rates and Prevent Population Decline (Bill 446) outlaws voluntary sterilization, which is believed to be the second most common method of modern contraception in Iran, and blocks access to information about contraception, denying women the opportunity to make informed decisions about having children. Coupled with the elimination of state funding for Iran's family planning programme, the move would undoubtedly result in greater numbers of unwanted pregnancies, forcing more women to seek illegal and unsafe abortions. The bill was passed in parliament with an overwhelming majority in August 2014 and is undergoing amendments as recommended by the Guardian Council, a body which needs to approve it before it can become law.

The Comprehensive Population and Exaltation of Family Bill (Bill 315) would further entrench gender-based discrimination, particularly against women who choose not to or are unable to marry or have children. The bill instructs all private and public entities to prioritize, in sequence, men with children, married men without children and married women with children when hiring for certain jobs. It also makes divorce more difficult and discourages police and judicial intervention in family disputes opening women up to increased risks of domestic violence. Bill 315 has moved one step closer to becoming law as its general principles were passed in Parliament on 2 November with 144 votes in favour, 25 opposed and 6 abstentions. The bill will now move to Parliament's Cultural Commission, which will analyse the budgetary costs to be incurred in operationalizing the bill's incentive schemes aimed at families with three or more children.

In practice, women continue to have reduced access to affordable modern contraception as the authorities have failed to restore the budget of the state family planning programme cut in 2012.

DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ETHNIC AND RELIGIOUS MINORITIES

Ethnic and religious minorities in Iran face widespread discrimination in law and practice. The Baha'i faith is not recognized under the Iranian Constitution and the Baha'i community faces persecution solely for practicing their faith. Members of these groups are subject to arbitrary detention, unfair trials, and prolonged incarceration. Members of religious minority groups include Baha'is; Christians, which is a diverse group made up of the Orthodox Armenian Church, Catholics, Protestants, and Christian converts from Islam; Jews; Mandeans; Sunnis, including Sunni converts from Shia Islam; Yarasan; and Zoroastrians. Some members of these groups have had their religious sites and communal property, including cemeteries, destroyed, and face limitations on where and how they may worship. Members of ethnic minorities, which include Ahwazi Arabs, Azeri Turk, Baluchis, Gilakis and Mazandaranis, Kurds, Lurs, and Turkmen ethnic groups, face limitations on their social, cultural, and linguistic rights.

Cases:

Seven leaders of the Baha'i community are serving a 20-year prison sentence in relation to their faith. A Tehran Revolutionary Court convicted the seven – **Fariba Kamalabadi, Mahvash Sabet, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rezaie, Behrouz Tavakkoli** and **Vahid Tizfahm** – in August 2009 of charges including “espionage for Israel”, “insulting religious sanctities” and “spreading propaganda against the system”. The seven denied all the charges. In September 2010, the group was told verbally that their sentences had been reduced to 10 years after an appeal court acquitted them of some of the charges, including espionage, but

they were not given a written copy of the court verdicts. In March 2011 the 20-year sentence was re-imposed on all seven.

Amnesty International considers all seven leaders of the Baha'i community to be prisoners of conscience and calls for them to be immediately and unconditionally released as they are held solely for the peaceful exercise of their right to freedom of religion;

Hossein Ali Mohammadi and Taha Kermani, members of Iran's Azerbaijani Turkish minority, have been sentenced to 10 years in prison on 12 May by Branch 3 of the Revolutionary Court for "insulting Islamic sanctities" and "vandalizing public property with the intent to rise up against the Islamic establishment". Both charges were based on an allegation that they had burnt a flag of the Islamic Republic of Iran painted on the verges of a highway in Tabriz in October 2013. The charge of religious insult was imposed because the Iranian flag contains the words "God is Great" (*Allahu Akbar*), though it was not established the flag in question contained these words. The intent to rise up against the Islamic establishment was held to exist because, the Court said, "the flag is an important and sacred sign for every country and respect for it is tantamount to respect for the existence of the country itself." The men have denied both charges. An appeal has been lodged with Branch 7 of Court of Appeal in East Azerbaijan province.